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The American Church Missionary Society.

The Beginning of the Cuban Mission

A LETTER

FROM

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THE BEGINNING OF THE CUBAN MISSION.

A LETTER FROM THE REV. PEDRO DUARTE.

MATANZAS, CUBA,
SAN JUAN DE DIOS, 60,
March 13, 1900.

MY DEAR FRIENDS:

In all the fair island of Cuba, there is no city more attractive and fair to look upon than Matanzas. It is beautiful for location. In front, and east of the city is the beautiful harbor, and far beyond lies the wide expanse of sea. To the north and west and south are high hills, or, in fact, a mountain range divided into three sections by two rivers, the San Juan and the Yumuri, which flow through the city and unite their waters as they reach the sea. The scenery in the San Juan and Yumuri valleys, both a short distance from the city limits, is picturesque and grand. For nearly seventeen years the service and work of the Master in this fair city, which God in nature hath so richly blessed, has been in my heart and mind night and day. In July, 1883, through the earnest effort of Mr. John P. Rhoads, of Philadelphia, who has ever been to me a faithful and wise friend, I was sent to Matanzas as a colporteur of the Bible Society of New York. Being then a candidate for Holy Orders under Bishop Stevens, of Pennsylvania, I was also licensed to act as lay reader. The first service of the Episcopal Church was held in Matanzas, August 5, 1883. After four months spent in Matanzas, sowing the precious seed of the Gospel and laying deep the foundation for our beloved Church, I returned to Philadelphia in order to pursue my studies at the Theological Seminary in that city. In January, 1885, was ordained Deacon in the Church of the Covenant, Philadelphia, and was sent at once to Cuba; the ladies of the Cuba Guild in that city being pledged for my support. During my absence of two years the Rev. Juan B. Bres, of Florida, now at rest in Paradise, had kept up the services of the Church in Matanzas. Without delay work was resumed by me, and regular services were maintained in Matanzas, and also in Havana and Bolondron, where, through God's grace, I had been helpful in planting Missions. February 24, 1895—the date of the last Cuban revolution—personal safety required the departure of self and family from Cuba. On

December 15, 1898—the war between Spain and the United States being ended—we were enabled to return to our native land. The work of our Church among the Cuban people was again taken up in Bolondron, Havana and Matanzas, and has been, since then, uniformly successful and signally, blessed. Time will not allow me to dwell at length upon the good and grand work done by the Rev. Manuel F. Moreno at Bolondron. Señor José R. Peña, a lay reader and a candidate for Holy Orders, has been both faithful and efficient in helping to maintain the Spanish services in Havana and Jesus del Monte, a suburb of Havana. It was my good fortune, shortly after my return to Matanzas, to be helpful in the relief of the reconcentrados. General Wilson, the Military Governor of the Province of Matanzas, kindly allowed me the privilege of aiding in the distribution of rations made by the American government to our poor, suffering people who had been driven by the Spanish soldiers from their homes in the country into the towns and cities of Cuba under Spanish control, without work and without food, to die of starvation. Doctor F. M. Fernandez and I found lying in the streets of Bolondron, thirty-two children, boys and girls, almost at the point of death from starvation. We at once took steps to relieve their great distress, and finally succeeded in placing them in an old house that had been a Spanish fort, supporting them there on the rations so generally furnished by the United States. Clothing, shoes and medicine were sent to me for distribution by charitable Church people in Philadelphia, New York and other points. We now realize the great need of a permanent home or Orphanage for the proper care and guardianship of young Cuban girls. The American Church Missionary Society, in charge of and supporting the work in Cuba almost from its inception, responded at once to this pressing need. The result has been the purchase and partial equipment of such an asylum or Orphanage in Matanzas, which was dedicated by Bishop Whitaker, Sunday, January 28, 1900. Fifty girls, varying in age from four to fifteen, will now be well taken care of and trained up in the way that leadeth to life. Many girls are being brought to me daily, and my heart yearns for them, but, as we have fifty girls enrolled already which tests our present ability, I am forced to answer, to the most piteous appeals, that no more can be taken in the Orphanage. Would that some faithful steward, whom God hath blessed, could see our Orphanage girls all dressed in white and wearing broad sashes with the name of the Orphanage inscribed thereon, in most reverent attendance at our Church services—English as well as Spanish! The sight of their pure, sweet, young faces as they worship would surely make a deep impression, and then God might open the way to a further enlargement of our work to save these immortal souls. Another story added to the Orphanage, and we have good strong walls now to build on, would give ample room and we could then care for more than double our present number of young Cuban girls. Two blocks from the Orphanage is the rectory and the little Church, practically under one roof,

where a free day school of 178 children, and a Sunday School and Sunday services are maintained. There is also a service in English every Sunday morning. Kindly allow me to state what help and encouragement have come to me from my dear wife, who has ever been at my side and has more than shared my sorrows and my trials. And my dear daughter, who was, as it were, my right hand in all my work, six months ago, at the age of 22, entered into that rest which remaineth for the people of God. The wound in my heart will only be healed when, in God's own time, the glad re-union shall come with the loved one gone before. Our kind friends, to whom we are so grateful, have dedicated the Orphanage in Matanzas to her precious memory. With grateful appreciation, your

Servant in Christ,

PEDRO DUARTE.

